

time at home during the holiday season. I am reminded how blessed I am this holiday season to return home to a rural State, where family values and community traditions run deep. There is no tradition more important to us than how we pass on, from one generation to the next, the workings on a family farm.

I am worried these rural traditions are under attack by Washington, DC. In September, our Department of Labor proposed new rules that would ban youth under the age of 16 from participating in what are many common farm-related tasks such as rounding up cattle on horseback, operating a tractor or cleaning out stalls with a shovel and wheelbarrow. I am sure there are many 15- and 16-year-olds who would be happy not to do that work, but it is important work, and it is a way fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, grandparents, work side by side with family members.

One of the things I care a lot about is agriculture. That matters to us in places such as Kansas because that is the economy of our communities. But I also know it is important for other reasons as well, not just dollars and cents. It is important because it is how, historically, in this country, we passed on our values from one generation to the next. Working side by side with moms and dads and grandparents is the way we pass on character and values and integrity from one generation to the next. It is something that throughout the history of our country has been important across our Nation when every place was a rural part of our Nation.

To most young people growing up on that family farm, jobs are routine, it is a part of their lives. These Department of Labor regulations are going to intrude significantly in that ability. According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, about 98 percent of our country's 2 million farms are family owned. By working alongside those parents and grandparents, important skills and values are learned. The problem we face now is that agriculture is a way of life and the Department of Labor wants to change that.

Until recently, farms jointly owned and operated by multiple family members had discretion over the responsibilities they gave their children on the farm. But this new rule would do away with that freedom. The Department of Labor is proposing to tell farmers and ranchers: We know what is best for your children and what they should and should not be doing.

The Department of Labor is also trying to do away with successful farm safety and training certification programs. In our part of the country and around the Nation, 4-H and FFA county extension offices are very important. They play a critical role in training and certifying young people to safely carry on farm activities. That happens today. But the Department has ignored research that shows such programs improve safety habits of young

people and instead criticizes these training programs for being too locally driven and lacking Federal direction.

One would assume, before making such a drastic change to farm labor rules, the Department would identify reliable evidence and data that show the need for changes, but it is quite the opposite. In fact, the Department of Labor admits it lacks data to justify many of its suggested changes. Furthermore, according to the National Farm Medicine Center, youth-related injuries from farm accidents have declined by nearly 60 percent from 1998 to 2009.

If you ask any farmer or rancher about the importance of safety, they would tell you safety is at the top of their list. It is their children. It is their neighbor's children. They care greatly. But they would also tell you it is critical for the rural way of life to be able to train and encourage the next generation to safely and successfully begin careers in agriculture. If today's young people are not given the chance to learn at a young age what it takes to operate a farm, we put at risk the future of agriculture in our Nation.

If these changes go into effect, not only will the shrinking rural workforce be further reduced and our Nation's youth be deprived of valuable career training opportunities but, most important, a way of life begins to disappear. Our country cannot afford to lose the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

I shared my concerns with the Secretary of Labor several weeks ago, in which we asked for a delay, a longer comment period. The comment period was running through fall harvest across most of the country. The Department of Labor granted a 30-day extension, but that expired December 1, about 2 weeks ago. Parents and communities should be allowed to look after the best interests of their families and citizens. Now that comment period has run. I hope the Department of Labor will take into account the serious concerns by farmers and ranchers, their families, and agribusiness across the country. But just a delay and longer comment period is insufficient. In fact, I am circulating a letter among my colleagues in the Senate that I am asking them to sign, requesting the Department of Labor not proceed to implement these rules. I ask my colleagues to take a look at that letter and please join me.

Local experts should be the ones conducting safety training programs to educate our Nation's young people. The future of agriculture depends on stopping this vast overreach of Executive authority, protecting individual rights.

We know rural America's values are not always the values held in Washington, DC. In the weeks ahead, I will continue to work with my colleagues to make certain this destructive rule does not move forward so we can protect and preserve our values for the next generation of American farmers

and ranchers, values our country so desperately needs.

TRIBUTE TO AARON POPELKA

Mr. MORAN. One of the beneficiaries of growing up on a family farm in Kansas is somebody I would also like to mention briefly this morning. As Members of Congress, we surround ourselves with bright minds and fellow natives of our home States. I have had the privilege of working alongside a young man, Aaron Popelka, as a member of my staff for 6 years. In those years, Aaron has proven himself to be a thoughtful voice in a chaotic Capitol Hill culture. With a bright policy mind, Aaron has advised me on agriculture and energy and trade policy while also serving as my chief council.

A native of Munden, KS, Aaron brought with him a commonsense approach to the way he conducted his duties on behalf of our State. Aaron will continue his duties on behalf of Kansas but in a different fashion. Aaron has accepted a position back home in Kansas and will leave my staff at end of the year. The lure of returning home to Kansas is powerful. Over the years, I have lost valued members of my staff, much like the rest of you. However, I appreciate the fact that while their departure from Washington DC is not pleasing to me, more often than not they return home to Kansas and the result is a benefit to our home State.

I am thankful for having had Aaron as a member of my staff. I am thankful for the faithful service he has provided to my fellow citizens in our home State. But I am most thankful for his friendship and I look forward to our paths crossing again back home.

Aaron, best of luck to you and God bless you and your family.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes as in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HINDERING JOB CREATION

Mr. COATS. Mr. President, the holiday season is coming upon us, a period of celebration and joy. But as we prepare to spend time with our friends and our families in the coming weeks, it is important to remember during this holiday season there are many families out there across this country who are hurting.

As I visit with Hoosiers, I hear concern in the voices of parents trying to